

<b>TITLE</b>	<b>SCHOOL TRANSPORT POLICY 2015-16</b>
<b>FOR CONSIDERATION BY</b>	School Admissions Forum 24 June 2014
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### **Consultation on changes to Home to School Transport Policies**

The Council is consulting during June/July, on amendments to the school transport policy, to be considered by Executive in July. This will allow the policy for 2015-16 to be included in school admissions guides, which the Council must issue to parents in September.

The two proposed changes affect the Council's main Home to School Transport Policy, and Post-16 Education Transport Policy Statement. A summary giving further information about the consultation and proposed changes is attached.

As the transport entitlement has a connection to school admissions, the Forum may wish to make comments on the proposed changes.

The changes aim to ensure that

- (1) the policy on transport entitlement for children of statutory school age applies equitably across all categories of schools and areas of the Borough.
- (2) students at post-16 will have the same level of transport entitlement whether they stay on into sixth forms or transfer to a college placement.

## CONSULTATION ON HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT POLICY.

### SUMMARY:

We need to review home to school transport policies because they are no longer a good fit with local circumstances and statutory requirements. Four key principles underpin the proposed changes:

- Promotion of access to education: the proposed policy revisions continue to offer children and young people the support they need to access high quality education.
- Fairness: the policies set out to ensure that children and young people across the borough in the same or very similar circumstances are offered the same level of support.
- Inclusivity: the policies set out to ensure that all children and young people with disabilities and SEN are offered arrangements that are the best preparation for adult life in that they are the least restrictive options, give the greatest degree of autonomy and are as normal as can be achieved.
- Making best use of scarce resources: all policy changes must be affordable within the Council's reduced overall budget.

### Why the need to consult?

The current Home to School Transport policy was last updated following the review of secondary school admissions, and the introduction of shared designated areas for some schools. A number of other changes have happened since that review – the number of secondary schools has risen to 8 schools, the majority of which are now Academies able to set or change their own admission areas. One of the Academies has extended its designated area since the last review. Because the present policy pre-dates these changes, it no longer sets out the criteria for transport entitlement as clearly as we would want it to.

The home to school transport policy covers both primary and secondary school transport. However, in practice the changes we are consulting will only have a significant effect for secondary school transport. A summary of the final policy will be included in the annual secondary school admissions guide.

### Aims of the policy

A key aim in reviewing the policy is to ensure that it operates equitably across all areas of the Borough:

- For families living in areas of the Borough where there is no local school that children can walk to, the Council should make transport arrangements and fund these.
- Where families have a local school which children could walk to, but choose to send them to an alternative school further away, parents are responsible for transport arrangements and should consider these when deciding school preferences.

These principles should be seen to apply equitably, regardless of which area a family lives in, or which schools serve their area.

Aside from the policy on entitlement to free transport, the Council also aims to promote healthy and sustainable travel within the borough, including travel to school. It is part of children's normal development that, as they gain confidence and competence, they are able to travel more independently to school so far as this is practicable. The Council, when making school travel arrangements for children that are eligible, should aim to do so

in ways that promote these broader aims, along with other activities such as schemes to promote walking and cycling.

Some children with special needs will need higher levels of support with travel, or may need to travel greater distances to attend specialist settings. The Council's approach should be to make travel arrangements that, in the context of each child's needs, normalises the educational experience for children and families and supports the level of independence they are able to develop, by providing so far as is practical the least restrictive means of transport. This is particularly relevant for children approaching the transition to further education or training, where developing children's travelling confidence and competence is an important element of independent living skills.

The Policy should also aim to offer families flexibility by providing alternatives to fixed travel arrangements, and this would include offering direct payments and personal travel budgets in the context of the Children and Families Act 2014.

### **Post-16**

There Council has a separate policy on transport for children of sixth form age (16-19 years old) which needs to be addressed in the light of the latest statutory guidance on this matter. This policy is routinely kept up to date and re-published annually.

As with the main policy, it should apply equitably across the borough, regardless of what type of establishment a young person attends, if this is their nearest course provider. The policy's main aim is to ensure travel is not a barrier to young people's participation in education and training beyond statutory school age. As with the main policy, it aims to promote sustainable travel, and encourage independence as children move into adulthood.

In terms of support for individual students, this policy signposts students to sources of travel information, advice and financial support, the funding for which is now held and administered by individual colleges and schools.

We are consulting on this occasion about a proposed change to address an anomaly which affects children of sixth form age in special education. We are also considering whether to update this policy statement, so as to cover all post-16 education including young adults up to 25 years old.

### **WHAT CHANGES ARE BEING PUT FORWARD IN THE CONSULTATION?**

Two main changes are proposed to take forward to consultation, addressing anomalies affecting mainstream secondary transport, and post-16.

#### **Mainstream policy (which in practice only affects secondary age children)**

At present, there are circumstances where children live within walking distance of a local school, yet are provided with free travel to alternative schools. This is due to the establishment of Oakbank School since the policy was last reviewed.

Because the current policy pre-dates Oakbank School, the use of 'designated area' terminology is ambiguous and does not reflect the combination of single, shared and overlapping designated areas which we now have.

CURRENT POLICY WORDING 2013-14
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For children resident in a **shared designated area**, any of the designated schools will be considered to be a *qualifying school* for transport assistance, even if it is not the nearest one. However, this will not apply where **one of the designated schools** was available and lies within safe walking distance of home, since providing transport assistance in those circumstances would not be compatible with the efficient use of public resources.

#### DRAFT NEW WORDING

For children living in **areas which have more than one designated school**, any of the schools may be considered to be a *qualifying school* for transport assistance, even if it is not the nearest one. However, this will not apply where **one of the designated schools** was available and lies within safe walking distance of home, since providing transport assistance in those circumstances would not be compatible with the efficient use of public resources..

It is important that whatever policy is determined it is one which can be applied across the Borough, without attempting to differentiate between different categories of state-sector schools.

The proposed policy change would help ensure the Council did not incur avoidable costs, transporting children to a more distant school when they could reasonably attend an alternative school within walking distance of home. School transport is funded from the Council's resources, unlike other education costs funded from Dedicated Schools Grant, and there continues to be an underlying pressure on school transport costs from the upwards trend in school-age population.

#### **Alternative option – the statutory minimum.**

A number of nearby authorities – such as Oxfordshire – have reduced the entitlement to the statutory minimum. Transport is **only** provided if the child attends the nearest available school (provided they do not live within safe walking distance) even if this is not a designated school.

The saving from moving to the statutory minimum may not be sufficient to outweigh the community reaction, and would be offset by some additional administration in assessing applications and potential appeals. There is the possibility of including this as a further option for consultation, which would allow further examination.

#### **Post- 16 Education Transport Policy – Special Education Transport**

For children in mainstream education, any entitlement to free transport only applies at statutory school age (4-16). Sixth Form pupils may continue to use Council transport, subject to availability, as farepayers.

The exception to this is children who attend special schools and stay on into the sixth form. In these cases, free transport continues to be provided. This is not the case if they transfer to colleges, where the Council does not provide any free transport. Statutory guidance says we should not treat students who opt to study at school sixth forms more favourably than those who opt to study at colleges.

Under the proposed change, the Council would continue to provide transport, where required, for special school sixth formers. However this would no longer be free but on the same basis as their mainstream peers. i.e. at the standard farepayer rate (with 50% reduction for students entitled to Free School Meals). The Council would continue to meet the difference between the farepayer charge and the actual transport costs.

For students attending college, the position would be unchanged, in that students should apply to the college directly to access funds which are now distributed to individual establishments rather than local authorities.

It would seem right in principle to extend the present 16-19 years policy, to include 19-25 years. There is a requirement to publish policy statements on both age ranges, but statutory guidance recognizes that it may be appropriate to publish a single policy covering the separate transport duties regarding 'children of sixth form age' and 'young adults'. This would also make sense with regard to the Children and Families Act, and the duties from September 2014 towards children with special needs from 0-25 years.

### **Timing of changes**

For all the proposed changes, consultation will be carried out during the summer term. Recommendations would then be brought to Executive for decision in July. This would allow any changes to policy to be published and brought to the attention of parents and young people when considering school/college choices from September onwards (for 2015 school admissions).

The post-16 policy statement would continue to be published, updated with the latest college information, by the end of May each year.

In both cases the changes would then apply to students newly admitted to schools from the 2015/16 school year. As with previous policy changes, it is proposed that students currently receiving free transport would continue to do so, with changes in entitlement only applying to new entrants.